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ABSTRACT

This folio series is designed to be used by school leaders--particularly superintendents and principals--involved in the process of comprehensive school reform. The folios can be used to initiate discussion, guide planning, or organize review sessions. The suggestions are intended to help the reader explore possibilities when designing a new reform initiative. The information will also assist in rethinking or reviewing reform efforts already under way. The folio is organized around eight issues that are essential elements of any successful program: research-based innovation, professional development, staff support, family and community involvement, external support and assistance, comprehensive design, resource allocation, and evaluation. Educators will find guidance about thinking comprehensively and ensuring that the intervention envisioned is based on sufficient, high-quality research findings. Suggestions are also provided for engaging the support of teachers and staff, involving family and community members in the life of the school, and using outside consultants, assistance providers, and other sources of external technical support. Tips for creating worthwhile professional development activities, aligning resources to better support program design and implementation, and evaluating progress toward goals and benchmarks are also provided. (Contains 56 references.) (DFR)

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LEADERSHIP FOLIO SERIES:

Guiding Comprehensive School Reform

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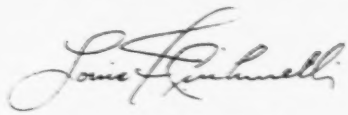
About this folio series . . .

This folio series is designed to be used by school leaders – particularly superintendents and principals – as they begin the process of comprehensive school reform. The folios can be used to initiate discussion, guide planning, or organize review sessions. The suggestions offered in these pages are intended to help you explore possibilities when designing a new reform initiative. However, the information will also assist you in rethinking or reviewing reform efforts already underway.

These folios are organized around eight issues that are essential elements of any successful program. You will find guidance about thinking comprehensively and ensuring that the intervention envisioned is based on sufficient, high-quality research findings. Suggestions also are provided for engaging the support of teachers and staff, involving family and community members in the life of the school, and using outside consultants, assistance providers, and other sources of external technical support. Finally, you will find tips for creating worthwhile professional development activities, aligning resources to better support program design and implementation, and evaluating progress toward goals and benchmarks.

Although these folios are written from the perspective of comprehensive school reform in general, sites participating in the federally initiated Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) Program will find them particularly helpful. Given that the importance of establishing goals and benchmarks is discussed in conjunction with evaluation, collectively these eight folios address all nine requirements for programs funded under the CSRD initiative.

As always, we appreciate any feedback or suggestions you may wish to share with us that might help improve our products and services and, most important, enhance the educational experience for every student.



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RESEARCH-BASED INNOVATIONS

Two factors greatly influence the success of comprehensive school reform. Selecting or developing an effective, research-based model or innovation is vitally important. Equally important, however, is adopting a model that matches school needs and goals.

District and school leaders may be asking, "How do I know whether a model is effective, based on research, and likely to work for us?" This is an essential question. Answering it involves critically examining the model in terms of the underlying theory, its successful implementation and replication, its effect on student achievement, and the studies validating its claims of effectiveness. (See sidebar.)

Although this process takes time, given the amount of resources that will be invested in reform, it's well worth the effort. Don't be reluctant to ask hard questions of model developers or to press for more evidence that a program will be effective. Thoroughly investigating the strengths of a proposed model up front can save a tremendous amount of time and money later, help ensure higher student achievement, and increase teacher morale and community support in the long run.

Recently, a number of leading education organizations commissioned a study of comprehensive school reform models to examine claims made by model developers (see American Institutes for Research, 1999). Of the 24 models reviewed, only three offered "strong evidence" of positive effects on student achievement. Five models showed "promising evidence" of positive effects. Six offered "marginal evidence." One offered "weak evidence." For the remaining nine models, there were no methodically rigorous studies that demonstrated higher student test scores.

The message here is "buyer beware." Before investing a great deal of time and money on a

Evaluating Innovations in Instruction

Theory
Are there materials available that explain the underlying theory and that include references to research?

Implementation
Has the model been fully implemented in multiple sites for a number of years?

Has the model been implemented in sites that are similar to the target school (e.g., in terms of grade levels and demographics)?

Replication
Has the model been replicated successfully in a wide range of schools and districts (e.g., urban, rural, suburban)?

Evaluation
Is there evidence of student achievement gains at the sites that have implemented the model?

Validation
How many reliable studies validate or refute claims of effectiveness?

Source: Adapted from *Catalog of School Reform Models*, by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1998, Portland, OR: Author.

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comprehensive school reform approach, district and school leaders should thoroughly study a proposed model to assess the likelihood that it will meet identified goals.

THE ROLE OF DISTRICT LEADERS

Selecting a research-based approach that best meets the needs of individual schools should be left to those who closely work with students: teachers and school leaders. Nonetheless, there are a number of things district leaders can do to help school-level teams make wise, well-informed decisions.

Guidelines for District Leaders

- Help principals and other staff members gather information about comprehensive school reform models, especially evaluations of their effectiveness.
- Give school leaders the data they need to identify specific school strengths and challenges. Dropout rates, attendance rates, and data on student performance are particularly useful.
- Sponsor staff development activities that help school leaders, teachers, and staff members strengthen their ability to analyze research, interpret data, and draw appropriate conclusions.
- Emphasize that using research-based practices is a core district value and commitment.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERS

School leaders must ensure that quality research guides any reform initiative. They must lead the process of carefully reviewing research studies to determine their validity, reliability, and fit with the needs and goals of the school.

Guidelines for School Leaders

- Set a clear expectation that high-quality research will guide the school's comprehensive school reform effort.
- Understand the characteristics of high-quality research.
- Seek out research that informs all aspects of the school's comprehensive school reform efforts.
- Gain more knowledge and skills in analyzing and interpreting research findings. Help teachers and school staff develop these strengths as well.
- Lead the process of evaluating the strength of comprehensive school reform models that might be adopted.
- Help teachers become good consumers of research. Share information about research-based innovations in meetings, newsletters, and via e-mail.

KEY CHALLENGE: JUDGING THE MERIT OF RESEARCH STUDIES

Developers of many comprehensive school reform models cite research studies to back up claims of effectiveness. But a key challenge for potential users is determining the validity and reliability of that research.

It's not necessary – nor is it feasible – to thoroughly investigate all of the research related to every available approach. But once the list of available reform models has been narrowed to a select few that might be implemented, it's time to consider the quality of the underlying research. There are a number of questions teachers and school leaders should ask to guide this process:

- Does the reform program follow logically from the research it is based upon? That is, does the reform truly reflect the strategies found to be effective in the research?
- Did the study use appropriate indicators of abstract concepts such as student motivation?
- Did the design of the study adequately control for alternate explanations of the findings?
- Did the study methodology adequately guard against bias and ensure objectivity?
- Can the results of the study be generalized to other students groups and contexts? In other words, will the study findings apply to our students and our school?

These questions are just a few of the many questions that can be asked when reviewing comprehensive school reform models. For further guidance on evaluating research studies and reform models, see *Research and Evaluation in Education and the Social Sciences* (Smith & Glass, 1987).

Where To Begin

Involve the school community in identifying criteria for developing a "short list" of possible reform programs to examine in more detail.

Learn about the characteristics of high-quality research, perhaps through study circles or by working with outside consultants.

Use this information to scrutinize claims made by model developers regarding the effectiveness of their reform programs.

RESOURCES

American Federation of Teachers. (1998). ***What works: Seven promising reading and English language arts programs.*** Washington, DC: Author. Available: http://www.aft.org/edissues/whatworks/wwenglish.htm

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Web Sites

National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform. http://www.goodschools.gwu.edu/

U.S. Department of Education. Guidance on the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program. http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/compreform/csrdgui.html

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Most people who hear the words "comprehensive school reform" take a deep breath because they know much work lies ahead. New, more challenging standards require much more of students, of course, but they also require much more of teachers and staff. Everyone involved in education must have an expanded ability – a greater capacity – if every student is to succeed.

For example, teachers must have the knowledge and skills to create lessons that are tied to standards and to develop standards-based assessments. They also may need to learn to use new grading methods or understand new formats for reporting students' progress by individual standard.

How can this capacity be developed? According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996), "schools that have found ways to educate all students well have done so by providing ongoing learning for teachers and staff" (p. 9). Clearly, professional development is the key to developing the capacity needed to reach the goal of comprehensive school reform.

THE ROLE OF DISTRICT LEADERS

A healthy district climate is one that encourages teachers to learn and grow. District leaders play an important role in creating a culture that values lifelong learning, first and foremost by leading the process of developing a vision of staff learning that focuses on student outcomes. All professional development activities across the district should grow out of – and be linked to – specific student learning needs.

Characteristics of Effective Professional Development

Focuses on teachers as central to student learning, yet includes all other members of the school community

Focuses on individual, collegial, and organizational improvement

Respects and nurtures the intellectual and leadership capacity of teachers, principals, and others in the school community

Reflects best available research and practice in teaching, learning, and leadership

Enables teachers to develop further expertise in subject content, teaching strategies, uses of technologies, and other essential elements in teaching to high standards

Promotes continuous inquiry and improvement embedded in the daily life of schools

Is planned collaboratively by those who will participate in and facilitate that development

Requires substantial time and other resources

Is driven by a coherent, long-term plan

Is evaluated ultimately on the basis of its impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning; and this assessment guides subsequent professional development efforts

Source: U.S. Department of Education, 1995

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Guidelines for District Leaders

- Communicate a strong and consistent message that staff development should be focused on helping students meet high standards.
- Identify professionals who can help plan, implement, and evaluate a program that meets the needs of teachers and staff.
- Create a climate of shared problem solving with school leaders. Work together to find ways to better tap into the expertise of teachers and staff, but also to identify capacities that need to be expanded.
- Give school leaders the flexibility to decide how professional development activities will be structured for their faculty and staff.
- Hold staff accountable for developing useful, relevant, and current professional development programs. Measure effectiveness and create a feedback loop that ensures ongoing improvement.
- Use ongoing evaluation of staff development activities to maintain alignment between staff development activities and reform goals.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERS

Principals and other school leaders should take the lead in creating and sustaining a climate of learning for everyone – students, teachers, staff, and administrators. One key way they can do this is to find opportunities each day to stimulate sharing and reflection about how to better help students learn.

Guidelines for School Leaders

- Know the fundamental concepts of adult learning.
- Learn about effective models and strategies for professional development.
- Encourage teachers to take responsibility for their own learning by modeling an ongoing commitment to personal and professional growth.
- Lead the process of gathering data to identify professional development needs and to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development programs.
- Secure the necessary human, fiscal, and technological resources.
- Find time for teachers to collaborate, share ideas, and learn together (e.g., developing lesson plans and units). Participate in these activities.

KEY CHALLENGE: CREATING A CULTURE OF LEARNING

Most people associate professional development with bringing in an outside consultant to lead an in-service. But effective professional development encompasses much more. Professional development is most useful when it

is embedded in the daily life of the school – when there is a *culture of learning* in the school and district.

A culture of learning is characterized by a respect for learning, a high level of trust, collaborative processes such as shared decision making, a mutual understanding of the goal of improved student learning, and a collective commitment to the success of all students. Cultivating these shared principles happens over time as teachers purposely study together, exchange ideas, reflect on their practices, and find better ways to help students learn. Without this kind of culture, teachers will find it difficult to learn all they need to know to change their practices in ways that lead to improved student achievement.

School leaders build a culture of learning by fostering respect, trust, and strong, personal connections among staff; by being nonjudgmental and focusing on the positive; and by organizing staff into grade-level or "vertical" (cross-grade) teams to accomplish specific instructional tasks. These collaborative structures (and others, such as action research groups and study groups) help create a culture of learning by providing time for dialogue, planning, and consensus building. Principals also help develop a culture of learning by providing the resources teachers and staff need to engage in shared reading and discussion about books or articles that stimulate thinking about teaching and learning. All of these actions send the message that everyone is valued, everyone is responsible, and everyone benefits.

Where to Begin

Believe that staff have the desire to succeed.

Examine the culture of the school. Look for ways in which the culture supports or impedes effective professional development.

Gather data about student learning. Use the data to identify professional needs.

Collaborate with teachers to design a professional development program that includes a variety of ways for them to acquire the knowledge and skills they need.

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Web Sites

National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform. http://www.goodschools.gwu.edu/

National Staff Development Council
http://www.nsdc.org

North Central Regional Education Laboratory
http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/pd0cont.htm

United States Department of Education
http://www.ed.gov/inits/teachers/teach.html

NATIONAL MODEL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AWARD WINNERS

1996/97

Lawrence Public Schools, Lawrence, KS
Samuel W. Mason Elementary School, Roxbury, MA
San Francisco Unified School District, San Francisco, CA
Wilton Public Schools, Wilton, CT
Woodrow Wilson Elementary School, Manhattan, KS

1997/98

Ganado Intermediate School, Patagonia, AZ
Geneva City Schools, Geneva, NY
H. D. Hilley Elementary School, El Paso, TX
Hungerford School, Staten Island, NY
International High School at LaGuardia Community College, Long Island, NY
Lewisville Independent School District, Lewisville, TX
Montview Elementary School, Aurora, CO
Shallowford Falls Elementary School, Marietta, GA

1998/99

Carroll Independent School District, Southlake, TX
Edmonds School District No. 15, Lynnwood, WA
Norman Public Schools, Norman, OK
Olathe District Schools, Olathe, KS
Sprayberry High School, Marietta, GA
Spring Woods Senior High School, Houston, TX
Wherry Elementary School, Albuquerque, NM

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STAFF SUPPORT

Support from teachers and staff members is the foundation of comprehensive school reform. Without it, reform efforts have little or no chance of success, particularly over the long term.

Building support for reform is critical from the very beginning of the planning process. But it doesn't stop there. Teachers, staff members, and administrators must work together to identify needs, chart a path of reform, and navigate the sometimes choppy waters of reform. With vigilance, this sense of teamwork and shared ownership can be built and reinforced at every step of the reform process.

THE ROLE OF DISTRICT LEADERS

The success of comprehensive school reform depends on teachers and staff believing that the reform program will be well worth their efforts in terms of improved student learning. Through actions, words, and policies, district leaders can dramatically affect the degree to which everyone sees the benefits of reform.

Guidelines for District Leaders

- Promote and publicize the district's commitment to reform that truly makes a difference in student learning. Create a detailed vision of how reform will benefit students.
- Create a team of leaders in every school and across every level of the district. In addition to principals, encourage teachers and staff members to take a leadership role in school improvement.
- Use joint planning meetings and contract negotiation sessions as opportunities to build trust, an essential element of successful collaboration.
- Establish an accountability system that is built on teamwork, support, and positive reinforcement, but nonetheless communicates a clear expectation that everyone is accountable for students' success.
- Make sure everyone knows that technical support is available for every phase of reform and understands how to access help.

Ways to Build Support

Involve everyone in designing and implementing a plan for comprehensive school reform.

Make it clear that "we're in this together."

Choose an important yet attainable first goal. Implement reform in stages.

Create a climate of continuous improvement. Encourage discussion, inquiry, reflection, and sharing of ideas.

Seek out suggestions for improvement. Use these ideas to make the program stronger and stronger over time.

Provide in-house support through coaching or mentoring.

Give teachers many avenues for sharing stories of success, as well as obstacles encountered.

Celebrate accomplishments along the way, no matter how small.

- Work closely with school leaders to publicize results, reward successes, and create an environment of support and teamwork.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERS

In order for teachers and staff members to support reform, they must recognize the need for reform, what the initiative entails, and what district and school leaders hope to accomplish. But they also must have time to think about implications, to ask questions, and to voice their beliefs and values. The more people see how the approach reflects their beliefs and values, the more likely they will be to support it. School leaders should focus on helping people make these connections and on bringing the school community together to make the most of the reform process.

Guidelines for School Leaders

- Use formal and informal meetings to give people a chance to build their understanding of needs and the plan for schoolwide improvement.
- Create a core improvement team that works together through the entire process of reform. Make sure the team represents every level and area of the school.
- After the short list of possible reform approaches has been identified, send a representative group to visit sites that are implementing those approaches. Ask the group to report back its findings and observations.
- Create frequent opportunities for people to talk about how the proposed initiative reflects the shared values of the school community and how it will enhance student learning.
- Ensure that everyone (e.g., teachers, aides, administrators, librarians, clerical staff) is clear about his or her role in the reform effort.
- Help teachers understand the instructional approaches, reporting requirements, and other changes that need to take place.
- Make sure people understand the aspects of reform they have flexibility to adapt and those that must be put in place without modification.
- Schedule time for teachers to meet in grade-level and cross-grade-level teams to talk about reform, to share ideas, and to problem solve.
- Pair teachers up as "reform buddies." Be sure to provide time for teachers to visit each other's classrooms and to talk about their progress.
- Value people's individual voices. Make it clear that even after a plan has been set in motion, it is not set in stone.

KEY CHALLENGE: CREATING EARLY SUCCESSES

By definition, comprehensive school reform involves changes in every aspect of schooling. Reform that affects every dimension of a school

– from the curriculum to school climate to school leadership – usually requires schools and districts to change their basic ways of operating. This can be an unsettling process. School leaders should be aware that failure breeds discontent, particularly if teachers are skeptical about reform in the first place.

One way to create early successes and overcome initial skepticism or resistance to the reform effort is to narrow the focus of reform for the first few months. Pick out a few key elements, and focus only on those initially. For example, if a central element of reform is launching a new reading program, consider setting a goal that in the first month teachers will learn about and try two key strategies and then meet to exchange ideas about how the strategies worked.

One reason teachers sometimes resist reform is that it often requires them to learn a great deal, which can be overwhelming. Change also suggests to most people that they will have to alter their practices, which they may view as even more work that they must squeeze into an already hectic schedule.

Thus, it's important for school leaders to build consensus around the need for change early in the reform process. Staff members need to feel a common sense of urgency – that the reform efforts are necessary. In addition, school leaders need to help teachers and other staff see that they will, in fact, reap the benefits of their extra efforts. One way to do this might be to host staff members from a site that has successfully implemented the reforms that the school is undertaking and ask them to share their own success stories.

Where to Begin

Make sure everyone is "on the same page" about the need and direction for reform.

Involve everyone in the process of exploring reform options and selecting the best approach.

Give everyone responsibility for some aspect of implementing reform.

The kind of transformational change that marks comprehensive school reform depends on the support and teamwork of faculty and staff. School and district leaders who recognize the critical importance of teachers and staff have come a long way toward creating a reform effort that will be successful over the long term.

RESOURCES

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FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The primary purpose of comprehensive school reform is to improve the quality of students' educational experiences so that learning is enhanced. Schools and districts are working hard to ensure that programs are coordinated, staff are trained, and the overall quality of instruction is improved. But schools must involve parents, families, and community members in meaningful ways for these efforts to realize their full potential.

Research indicates that involving parents in their children's education benefits students and schools. Student achievement increases, attendance and classroom behavior improve, and relationships between teachers and parents grow stronger. A vital partnership between parents and school staff can contribute immensely to students' success and, ultimately, to the school's success.

A family involvement program that is characterized by a series of disconnected activities will not reap many benefits. To achieve the results described above, school staff and parents must work together to create and continue to refine a thoughtful, coordinated plan that results in a richer, more productive environment for everyone. Family involvement must go beyond mere information sharing. An invitation to learn, share in decision making, and work collaboratively is a must.

THE ROLE OF DISTRICT LEADERS

District leaders create the vision and model the commitment to involving family and community members in the life of the school community. They can make this vision a reality by building personal relationships with parents, business leaders, and other community members, developing appropriate policies, and reinforcing practices that encourage participation.

Dimensions of Family and Community Involvement

The Home Environment
Help parents set up home environments that "support children as students."

Communication
Communicate with families about school programs and students' progress.

Volunteering
Recruit and organize parent and community volunteers.

Decision Making
Include parents in school decisions: develop parent leaders.

Collaborating with the Community
Tap into community resources to strengthen school programs and enhance student learning and development.

Source: Adapted from Epstein et al. (1997)

Guidelines for District Leaders

- Make it clear that involving family and community members in all schools in the district is a priority.
- Help people understand how everyone wins when parents, families, and community members are involved in schools.

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- Provide the resources that schools need to strengthen ties to families and the community.
- Involve a representative groups of parents, business leaders, and other community members in the work of district-level advisory and policymaking groups.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERS

School leaders have an important role to play in involving families in the school community. They typically have more direct contact with parents than do district leaders. School leaders set the tone for family involvement in many ways, such as sending regular communications to families and complimenting teachers and staff who include parents in classroom and school activities.

A good first step is to sponsor activities that let families, teachers, and staff members get to know one another. The process of building relationships is ongoing, but "get-acquainted" activities such as home visits, back-to-school picnics, neighborhood meetings, and classroom pot lucks can go a long way toward developing a successful partnership between school staff and families. These activities help to create a school environment that welcomes parents and encourages them to ask questions and voice concerns.

Guidelines for School Leaders

- Learn how other school communities have successfully involved parents, other family members, and community members.
- Make parents feel welcomed and valued in the school, for example, by immediately greeting people when they arrive; by posting an easily accessible and visible suggestion box; and by making "sign-in" notices as friendly as possible.
- Communicate frequently with parents – and community members, when appropriate – about the school's goals and ways in which they can contribute to students' learning.
- Learn about the skills and talents of family and community members. An annual survey is one way to gather this information. Volunteers are vitally important in all schools.
- Support faculty and staff members in their efforts to involve family and community members by providing needed resources.
- Work with teachers and parents to design activities that positively impact educators' perceptions and expectations of families and other community members.

KEY CHALLENGE: OVERCOMING TIME AND RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS

Many parents and community members want to be involved in their local schools, but have work, financial, and time commitments that are barriers to making good on their intentions. Responding to these needs as much as possible increases involvement and enhances relationships between the school and the community. There are many creative ways to juggle schedules, respond to needs, and provide

services that facilitate parents' involvement in school activities.

One key way to increase involvement is to ease time and cost barriers. For example, make time for parent-teacher conferences before and after school when parents drop off and pick up their children; hold meetings in neighborhood buildings; provide transportation and child care services for meetings or classes; provide food before or after meetings; and schedule art, science, or musical programs in conjunction with meetings. In addition, offer affordable before- and after-school programs that family members and students can participate in together.

Let parents know that there are many ways they can participate in the school community from home. Making phone calls, writing newsletters, preparing mailings, making classroom decorations, and hosting neighborhood get-togethers are just a few examples.

Another key vehicle for increasing involvement is communication. Set up a parent center, and create a family-community coordinator position. Publicize family-community activities in mailings and notices posted around the school; through phone calls and newspaper articles; and in grocery stores, shopping malls, and places of worship. When appropriate, be sure to communicate information in languages other than English.

Finally, identify ways in which the school can help meet the needs of families in the school community. For example, evening or weekend sessions about health and nutrition, learning disabilities, parenting, available social services, English as a second language, and earning a GED can be valuable topics for family and community members alike.

Where to Begin

Put together a team to develop an action plan for increasing or improving family and community involvement.

Conduct a needs assessment to identify family needs and areas that might be targeted by the partnership.

Schedule activities that let staff, parents, and community members get to know one another.

Develop a written policy that clarifies the school's philosophy and commitment to involving families and other community members.

Secure support from school board members, district leaders, parents, community members, leaders, and social service agencies.

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Children First:
The Web site of the National PTA
http://www.pta.org/index.stm

Education Week on the Web:
Parent Involvement
http://www.edweek.org/context/topics/issues.cfm

Family Education Network
http://familyeducation.com/

Family Involvement in Children's Education:
Successful Local Approaches
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/FamInvolve

National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform. http://www.goodschools.gwu.edu/

National Coalition for
Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE)
http://www.ncpie.org

National Parent Information Network (NPIN)
http://www.npin.org

Partnership for Family Involvement in Education
http://pfie.ed.gov

Strong Families, Strong Schools
http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/families/strong

U.S. Department of Education. Guidance on the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program. http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/compreform/csrdgui.html

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EXTERNAL SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE

Anyone involved in comprehensive school reform knows that it is not an easy task. Assistance from an experienced outside agency can sometimes provide the inspiration and information people need as they "muster the will and the skill" to change (Miles & Louis, 1990).

Technical assistance can take many forms and occur at various stages of the reform process. It may involve using research to design the reform program, solving implementation problems, providing staff training, assessing progress, and making recommendations for program improvement.

Regardless of the source of the external assistance (e.g., model developer, university, regional educational laboratory, private agency), the district or school must develop an effective relationship with the provider. Productive partnerships result when there is a shared, clear understanding about responsibilities, goals, and a plan of action. This clarity must be matched with a commitment to open and ongoing communication, including feedback about how the work and the partnership are progressing from the perspectives of everyone involved.

THE ROLE OF DISTRICT LEADERS

Comprehensive school reform is more likely to succeed if there is support at all levels of the education system. Although district leaders may not be involved with model developers or technical assistance providers to the extent that school staff will be, their involvement is especially critical in the early stages of the relationship as roles, responsibilities, and expectations are clarified. District leaders also have a role to play in maintaining these relationships throughout the duration of the partnership.

Key Questions to Ask Assistance Providers

What types of services are available?

To what extent can services be tailored to the school's needs?

How are the people who will work with the school chosen? What are their qualifications?

How is feedback provided? What happens if the school is not satisfied with the assistance?

Does the assistance include professional development for school leaders?

What skills will be taught and what topics will be covered in the professional development activities offered?

To what extent do materials and professional development activities address the needs of diverse learners?

Guidelines for District Leaders

- Create a resource bank of qualified providers.
- Be clear about district goals and the extent to which provider services can be tailored to help meet them.

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- Consider how the services provided will address the public's expectations.
- Give school leaders the decision-making authority they need to work effectively with the assistance provider.
- Determine the total cost of obtaining outside technical assistance. Be sure to consider the direct cost of services as well as indirect costs such as substitute teachers, equipment, travel, materials, and stipends.
- Allocate the financial and human resources needed to ensure that the partnership will be productive.
- Modify district policies, if necessary, to support the work of the partnership.
- Be clear about the district's constraints for payment (e.g., how often and when).
- Develop a plan for continually monitoring the assistance. Provide feedback to the service provider on a regular basis. Ask how the provider's work will be evaluated.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERS

School leaders should develop a strong relationship with technical assistance providers since school staff will work directly with the providers or be most directly affected by the work. Developing this relationship helps external providers feel more connected to the school community.

Guidelines for School Leaders

- Become thoroughly familiar with the capabilities of the external assistance provider, the school's needs, and the staff's needs and abilities.
- If the district has not already done so, check that the provider has a well-trained staff, quality materials, a plan for monitoring the work, and evidence that the assistance is based on best practices.
- Collaborate with the external assistance provider to develop a plan for working together. Clearly describe expectations for both partners.
- Allocate and schedule the time and resources necessary to work with the assistance provider.
- Encourage teachers and staff members to participate in external assistance activities.
- Communicate frequently with the assistance provider, with teachers, and with staff members about progress toward agreed-upon goals (e.g., teacher learning, higher student achievement).
- Establish and support a leadership team to work with the assistance provider on an ongoing basis.
- Provide opportunities for staff members to share concerns and to celebrate progress with the assistance provider.
- Encourage teachers and staff members to apply the advice and expertise they have gained.
- Look for evidence that the provider's advice and expertise are being applied in the classroom. Help teachers understand the need to assess whether outside assistance is helping them improve student learning.

KEY CHALLENGE: REACHING AN UNDERSTANDING ABOUT ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

A key challenge in working with external assistance providers is reaching a shared understanding about the type and extent of services to be provided. An important first step is to learn as much as possible about the provider's services. Talk with previous clients, read information offered by the provider, and ask direct questions about services the school may purchase. Enter the partnership with a realistic picture of how the provider can help the school reach its goals.

To help teachers and staff members understand the kind of assistance that is available, schedule question-and-answer sessions during staff or team meetings. Questions that arise can be shared with the whole staff via e-mail or memos. Distributing fact sheets at meetings might also be helpful.

Another way to build shared understanding is to publicly display the agreements that have been reached about services. For example, write memos, articles for the school newsletter, or reports for a partnership bulletin board.

Even after an agreement has been reached, it is important to emphasize the school's goals in all conversations with the assistance provider. Being clear about expectations, knowing the right questions to ask, and communicating frequently about progress will increase the chances that the work of the partnership will be fruitful.

Where to Begin

Identify potential technical assistance providers.

Select two or three that appear to offer the services needed.

Interview these providers. Speak with previous clients if possible.

Prepare a summary of program and service needs. Clarify goals and desired outcomes.

Schedule an initial meeting to discuss goals, needed services, and parameters for working together.

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Comprehensive Design

What exactly does it mean for a reform program to be "comprehensive"? There seems to be a great deal of misunderstanding, particularly among schools and districts that have applied for funding under the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration legislation. Many school and district leaders have mistakenly believed that simply adopting one of the nationally known "comprehensive school reform" models is all it takes to bring about the complex changes needed to improve student achievement.

It is easy to see how many schools have focused their attention more on finding the right reform *model* rather than on developing a complete reform *program*. Listings of models have been published in many places, model developers are featured at showcases, and guidelines for selecting a model are widely available.

In fact, adopting a reform model – usually an externally developed, research-based approach to improvement – is only one possible step in the process of creating a larger, ongoing comprehensive school reform effort. If a model (or models) is adopted, it should be integrated with the larger plan for reform into a coherent strategy for school improvement. The focus of a comprehensive school reform program should be the entire school community. All aspects of school improvement – including professional development, governance, external assistance and financial resources – should work together to strengthen the school's core academic program.

Characteristics of Comprehensive School Reform

Integrates the following components into a coherent, schoolwide — *comprehensive* — program:

- Curriculum, instruction, and assessment strategies based on reliable research and best practices
- Ongoing professional development
- School governance
- Meaningful parent and community involvement
- Evaluation

Is guided by measurable goals and benchmarks that are tied to state standards

Is supported by faculty, administrators, and staff members

Uses all available resources — financial, human, technology as well as external assistance

More and more school and district leaders have come to appreciate the importance of a systematic approach to school reform that coordinates all aspects of a school's operations to help students achieve challenging academic standards. Clearly, being comprehensive is the challenge of school reform. As shown in the sections that follow, there are ways that district and school leaders can ensure that this challenge is met.

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THE ROLE OF DISTRICT LEADERS

The primary role of district leaders is to establish strong, clear direction that helps schools set reform goals and begin the process of aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment. However, the direction set should be broad enough to allow schools to make site-based decisions about how to align the various components of reform.

Guidelines for District Leaders

- Lead a collaborative effort to create overall vision, mission, and goals.
- Involve representatives from all buildings in the development of a districtwide comprehensive school reform plan.
- Set the expectation that school improvement plans will address all of the components of comprehensive school reform.
- Provide resources for professional development and other technical assistance to help school staff learn how to address the components.
- Provide schools with choices about how to use funds and how to govern themselves.
- Encourage schools to articulate how their reform efforts are linked to district goals and reform efforts.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERS

The primary role of school leaders is to help everyone keep the big picture of comprehensive school reform in mind. It's easy for people to get caught up in details and day-to-day problems and get off task. Principals and other school leaders must take the lead in keeping everyone focused on the larger vision and goals of reform.

Guidelines for School Leaders

- Use every opportunity to keep the vision and goals for reform foremost in everyone's mind and tied to school activities.
- Stay focused on what it means to be comprehensive. As a challenge arises in one aspect of the school (e.g., a new state assessment is mandated), carefully consider how it will affect the rest of the school (e.g., the culture and climate).
- Establish organizational structures such as grade-level teams. Involve all staff in decision making related to the selection, implementation, and evaluation of the approach to reform.
- Work with staff to build understanding of how the components of reform will work together.
- Provide opportunities for staff to discuss how the components support one another in practice.
- Look for evidence that the components support, rather than interfere with, one another.

KEY CHALLENGE: MAKING THE COMPONENTS WORK TOGETHER

A key challenge in designing a comprehensive school reform plan is figuring out how to make the various components work together in a coherent way. The irony is that the term "comprehensive" may suggest that school reforms need to be broad and expansive, addressing everything under the sun, so to speak. But this is not the case. Instead, schools need to be focused on a single goal or set of goals that guide all their reform efforts. In this way, reform efforts become more integrated and, thus, more comprehensive.

The first step in designing a comprehensive school reform plan is to focus on clearly defined, broadly agreed-upon goals. Students' achievements of high academic standards is a good place to begin when establishing goals.

For Example . . .

Goal: 80 percent of students will reach proficient levels for mathematics standards as gauged by their achievement on the statewide assessment.

Next, schools should determine whether the "stuff" of schooling (e.g., curriculum, instruction, assessment) will help them accomplish those goals.

For Example . . .

Does the curriculum reflect the knowledge and skills addressed on the test? What new instructional strategies do teachers need to use to increase students' understanding and skill?

Where to Begin

Create a clear vision for reform that is tied to state and district standards.

Identify all of the aspects of the school that may be affected by or integral to reform.

Consider the schoolwide effects of the proposed plan. Does it address the various aspects of the school system (i.e., the "stuff" and the "people," as well as the "structures" that bring them together)?

Make sure stakeholders understand and endorse the reform plan.

The next step is to make sure that the "people" element of schools (e.g., professional development, school climate, behavior management) will help school leaders reach identified goals.

For Example . . .

What professional development experiences do teachers need to help improve students' achievement levels on the statewide test? How can teachers better share information about students' progress?

Finally, school leaders should strive to make sure their organizational "structures" (e.g., accountability systems, community engagement, and the use of resources such as time and money) also support school goals.

For Example . . .

How should we convey students' progress to parents?

In practice, the school's comprehensive reform plan model should result in an integrated, coherent approach designed to meet identified goals. As the plan is implemented and refined along the way, teachers and school leaders should continue to look at the schoolwide impact of the program particularly in terms of student achievement. McREL's (in press) *Asking the Right Questions: The School Leader's Guide to Systemic Thinking About School Improvement* is one tool school leaders might use to determine whether school improvement efforts do, in fact, address all parts of their school system in a comprehensive, integrated way that results in improving the achievement of all students.

RESOURCES

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RESOURCE ALLOCATION

When asked what it takes to reform schools, most people say "money." But it takes more than just money. The success of reform hinges largely on whether schools and districts know how to effectively use available federal, state, local, and private resources to improve student achievement.

An important first step is determining how much the new reform effort will cost. Think about staff needs as well as the cost of professional development, consultants, materials, substitutes, and release time.

Once the total cost of the effort has been determined, take stock of available resources. What sources of funding are available, and how can they best be used? This process is somewhat like deciding what to make for dinner by looking into a refrigerator. There are many items to consider – some are hidden, some aren't needed, some are used infrequently, and some are used all the time, so not much is left.

Finding the best way to use resources also involves knowing how to efficiently combine funds from various sources. Reducing duplication and fragmentation of services increases the likelihood that improved student learning will be realized.

THE ROLE OF DISTRICT LEADERS

One of the primary responsibilities of district leaders is to create policies that give schools the flexibility to use resources as they see fit. This is especially true in terms of staff assignments.

District leaders also can help by defining a clear goal for reform, developing standards and assessments to focus efforts at individual school sites, and making it clear to school leaders that resources should be allocated in ways that support these goals and, ultimately, student learning.

Guidelines for District Leaders

- Understand how federal requirements for combining funds apply to your district. (See sidebar for examples of funding sources.)

Federal Funding Streams that Might be Combined

- Even Start
- Migrant Education
- Eisenhower Professional Development
- Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities
- Innovative Education Program
- Federal Bilingual Education Program
- Immigrant Education Act Program
- Indian Education Act Program
- McKinney Homeless Assistance Act Program
- Carl Perkins Vocational Program

- Make sure the district's reform plan spells out how resources will be coordinated across the district. This plan can serve as a model for school leaders to follow in coordinating resources in their individual schools.
- Involve a representative group of staff and parents, including those of special education children, in the resource allocation planning process.

- Earmark or set aside a funding pool to "jump start" the reform process. Also consider resources needed to support ongoing efforts.
- Give school leaders the authority to reallocate budgets and make decisions about staff assignments.
- Establish, build, and capitalize on partnerships with a range of community groups, from education foundations and local businesses to intermediate service agencies, higher education institutions, and neighboring districts.
- Use contract negotiations as venues for exploring creative solutions to resource allocation challenges.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERS

School leaders guide and set the tone for the school-level resource allocation process. They play a key role in building understanding about the process so that people support rather than resist it. They can inspire creative solutions to resource problems by modeling how to move beyond assumptions about what is possible and explore each situation with an open mind.

Guidelines for School Leaders

- Seek out information about successful approaches to resource allocation. Read articles and other publications (such as those suggested in this folio) about approaches other schools have taken.
- Know the strengths of the staff. Develop an inventory of staff members' knowledge, skills, and interests. Look for ways to better capitalize on these strengths.
- Lead the process of gathering information about current spending, needs, and available resources.
- Work with the staff to identify the implications of reallocating resources, for example, in terms of changes in staffing, curricula, and relationships.
- Bring together program leaders to identify ways to use resources more efficiently. How is money being spent now? Are there common needs? Can resources serve more than one purpose? The process of figuring out how to "stretch dollars" can point to better solutions in the long run.
- Keep everyone informed and involved in the process. Communicating along the way gives stakeholders a chance to digest ideas and offer useful feedback before plans are set in stone.
- Advocate for decision-making power to control the school-level budget.
- When seeking funds, present organized, clear plans and support arguments with research and best practice.
- Seek waivers to policies or changes in policies at the state, district, or school level in order to allocate resources effectively.
- Build support for programs that have benefitted from a reallocation of resources by monitoring and reporting success.

KEY CHALLENGE: FINDING RESOURCES

A priority for most schools is finding additional resources for instruction, professional development, and other priorities. Developing a plan that results in these additional resources may mean looking at resources in new ways.

One way to direct adequate resources to key areas is to rethink teachers' schedules and responsibilities. For example, consider creating staggered schedules, replacing full-time with part-time positions, or adding teachers who have expertise in target content areas.

Nonacademic programs are another area in which resources might be reallocated. Consider moving support staff from nonacademic subjects to core subject areas. Create larger groups of students for nonacademic subjects. Refocus nonacademic programs so they incorporate the teaching of core, academic knowledge and skills.

Find new ways to creatively use financial resources. For example, consider new uses of Title I funds, or shift resources to help teachers learn to use new curricula or instructional strategies.

Finally, advocate for increased funding at the state and local levels. Find ways to let policymakers and the public know about the tremendous potential of comprehensive school reform to improve student achievement.

Teachers, staff members, and other stakeholders sometimes resist efforts to allocate or reallocate resources to support comprehensive school reform because they fear losing their power or their jobs. In truth, some difficult decisions regarding personnel may have to be made. In many cases, however, people can simply shift roles, but keep their jobs and, in fact, end up being more productive.

Where to Begin

Set up a resource allocation planning team.

Estimate the total cost of the reform program.

Identify available resources.

Identify federal, state, district, and local sources of additional funding.

Determine how funds from various sources might be efficiently combined.

Principals and other school leaders should work to create a sense of shared commitment to reform. This may take time. It is not enough simply to tell stakeholders that comprehensive school reform can succeed if everyone works together. Teachers, staff members, parents, and other stakeholders may have questions, concerns, and useful ideas that call for meaningful dialogue. Having a well-thought-out plan, as well as research to support claims, can make a difference. Parents, union representatives, and other stakeholders are more likely to support school-level decision making about allocating resources if they see that a future path has been thoughtfully charted.

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EVALUATION

Evaluation is a valuable process for gathering information about reform. The process can help answer an array of questions, such as, "Are things going as planned?" "Are we beginning to see the results we anticipated?" "What changes should we make, if any, to ensure success?" The answers to these questions can help refine reform plans as necessary to enhance their impact on student learning.

The evaluation process should consider the effectiveness of program implementation as well as the extent to which program outcomes have been met. Thus, goals as well as related benchmarks should be set. For example, a district might set a goal that "all 3rd grade students will be reading at grade level within two years." A related milestone might be that "75% of students will be reading at grade level within one year." Evaluation can lead to meaningful conclusions when program goals and benchmarks are clear and measurable.

THE ROLE OF DISTRICT LEADERS

District leaders play a key role in supporting schools in their efforts to evaluate their comprehensive school reform plans. District support comes in many forms – from communicating about the importance of evaluation to allocating resources for planning, conducting, and following up on the evaluation.

Guidelines for District Leaders

- Communicate the importance of evaluation and the expectation that program implementation and outcomes will be examined.
- Provide the support schools need to set clear, measurable program goals and identify milestones or benchmarks against which the progress of reform can be assessed.
- Designate resources to support evaluation, including funds for technical expertise and professional development to help staff members gain the knowledge and skills they need to effectively collect and use data to inform decision making.

A Five-Stage Evaluation Process

1. Plan the Evaluation
Define the purpose of the evaluation. Identify program evaluation requirements that must be met. Identify stakeholder expectations, available resources, and staff members' areas of expertise.

2. Design the Evaluation
Link the evaluation to the program. Identify evaluation questions, data sources, variables, and measures. Develop a plan of action.

3. Conduct the Evaluation
Obtain or create data collection instruments. Collect and analyze data.

4. Report the Findings
Organize study findings. Select appropriate reporting media and formats. Disseminate the findings.

5. Encourage Stakeholders to Use Findings
Create opportunities for stakeholders to discuss findings. Follow up with stakeholders to determine how they are using the findings. Revise the evaluation plan as needed.

Source: Cicchinelli & Barley, 1999

- Help school leaders negotiate with model developers and other providers to ensure that prescribed evaluation activities also support the school's evaluation needs.
- Work with school leaders to design an evaluation program that incorporates input from parents and other community members and reports back results.
- Clarify how evaluation results will be reported to and used by the board and other stakeholders.
- Remove policy or procedural barriers to planning, conducting, and following through on the evaluation.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERS

Program evaluation is a systematic process designed to gauge the quality and effectiveness of reform and the degree to which program goals and benchmarks have been met and reflect state and local academic standards. School leaders play a key role in overseeing this process and creating a shared commitment to conducting an effective and valuable evaluation process.

Guidelines for School Leaders

- Help teachers, parents, students, staff, and other stakeholders gain a common understanding of the purposes and value of evaluation.
- Know district and state requirements for evaluation.
- Set up an evaluation team to design and carry out the evaluation. Provide release time as needed for the team to do its work.
- Stress the importance of setting program goals and benchmarks that are tied to students' academic performance.
- Ensure that goals and benchmarks are specific enough to provide direction, yet general enough to allow flexibility in implementation.
- Set challenging but feasible benchmarks for all key aspects of the reform initiative. This helps ensure that the evaluation process will reveal a more complete picture of the effects of innovations.
- Promote evaluation as one aspect of continuous improvement, and dispel fears that evaluation is a way to assign blame.
- Clarify expectations about the evaluation process with teachers, parents, service providers, and other key stakeholders.
- Help create a culture of critical inquiry and improvement by asking questions about evidence of student learning.
- Encourage staff to use data by giving them time and opportunities to gather and analyze data and report findings.
- Use evaluation resources provided by the district. Seek additional resources for evaluation as needed.
- Regularly report progress to stakeholders. Keeping all stakeholders informed will help build support for the effort, particularly if incremental improvements can be demonstrated.
- Help stakeholders understand that reform is not always a smooth process and that improvements occur over time.

KEY CHALLENGE: GAINING EVALUATION EXPERTISE

One of the most important challenges in preparing for an evaluation is helping staff gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need to conduct the evaluation and then to use the results to guide decision making. Strengthening skills early in the process lays the foundation for a successful evaluation.

A good place to begin is assessing the skills and understanding of those who will be part of the evaluation. What expertise do staff members have? What knowledge and skills do they need to participate in the evaluation process and to interpret data appropriately?

After staff needs have been assessed, set up training opportunities that meet those needs. Some people are likely to be more versed than others in evaluation. Thus, some staff members may need general sessions on the basic elements of a successful evaluation, while others may benefit more from focused sessions on data collection and analysis.

Staff also can extend and build their capacity to conduct evaluations by seeking outside expertise from private consultants or district evaluation experts, using print resources on evaluation, and partnering with universities. Principals can help by finding resources for professional development experiences.

As staff members learn more about the evaluation process, they may become less concerned that data will be used against them. This concern often arises because people think they will be blamed for any inadequacies the process reveals. To help prevent overly negative reactions to data collection, the principal and the evaluation team should make it clear that the primary purpose of the evaluation is to improve the program, not to end it.

Where to Begin

Determine the skills and time staff will need to complete the evaluation. Allocate the necessary resources.

Establish an evaluation planning team.

Develop an evaluation plan that is as specific as possible.

Focus initial efforts on implementation questions.

Bring in an evaluation consultant during the design stage to help identify cost-effective ways to focus the evaluation.

Through careful planning, use of outside resources, and attention to skill building, schools can overcome concerns about evaluation. As a result, all stakeholders will be better informed about the effects of reform and students will have a greater chance of benefitting from them.

RESOURCES

Bernhardt, V. L. (1998). *Data analysis for comprehensive schoolwide improvement.* Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Cicchinelli, L., & Barley, Z. (1999). *Evaluating for success: Comprehensive school reform: An evaluation guide for districts and schools.* Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.

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Hassel, B. (1998). *Comprehensive school reform: Making good choices for your school.* Oakbrook, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. Available: http://www.ncrel.org/csri/choices/intro.htm

Herman, J. L. (Ed.). (1987). *Program evaluation kit.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Holcomb, E. L. (1999). *Getting excited about data: How to combine people, passion and proof.* Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press.

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. (1998). *Catalog of school reform models.* Portland, OR: Author. Available: http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/natspec/catalog/index.html

Tesch, R. (1990). *Qualitative research: Analysis types and software tools.* New York: Falmer Press.

Yap, K., Douglas, I., Railsback, J., Shaughnessy, J., & Speth, T. (1999). *Evaluating whole-school reform efforts: A guide for district and school staff.* Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Web Sites

Connecting with other CSRD Schools
http://www.csrdweb.net

Laboratory for Student Success
http://www.temple.edu/LSS/

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)
http://www.mcrel.org/CSRD/

National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform. http://goodschools.gwu.edu

Regional Comprehensive Centers
http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/

U.S. Department of Education. Guidance on the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program. http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/compreform/csrdgui.html

McREL Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning
2550 S. Parker Rd., Ste. 500, Aurora, CO 80014 • phone 303.337.0990 • fax 303.337.3005 • www.mcrel.org